

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1796

INFO AMCONSUL HONG KONG

AMEMBASSY PARIS

CINCPAC HONOLULU

DIA WASHDC

JCRC BARBERS PT HAWAII

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BANGKOK 22253

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: CASC,PINT, VS

SUBJ: DEBRIEFING OF VIET-NAM RETURNEES - PART ONE: THE PEOPLE

REF: BANGKOK 21551

SUMMARY: AMONG THE AMERICANS AND DEPENDENTS WHO DEPARTED SAIGON AUGUST 1, SOME RECEIVED HARSH TREATMENT SINCE THE FALL OF VIET-NAM. THEIR STORIES AND THOSE OF OTHERS ARE DESCRIBED IN THIS MESSAGE. END SUMMARY.

1. EMBASSY HAS COMPLETED ITS DEBRIEFINGS OF AMERICANS AND DEPENDENTS WHO DEPARTED SAIGON AUGUST 1. FOLLOWING IS THE FIRST OF A SERIES OF REPORTS ON THEIR COMMENTS. NUMBER OF PASSENGERS ON FLIGHT WAS FORTY-NINE VICE FIFTH REPORTED REFTEL. PERSON WHO DID NOT SHOW WAS SAN MEN MAN, ABOUT WHOM NEITHER WE NOR PASSENGERS KNOW ANYTHING.

2. IN THE CASES OF ALL BUT MAURICE BAUHAHN AND PAUL HORTON,
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EACH PASSENGER ON THE FLIGHT BEGAN HIS STORY BY EXPLAINING

HOW HE MISSED THE EVACUATION. Y.L. CHING, FOR EXAMPLE, SAID HE WAS TEARGASSED BY MARINES BEFORE THE LAST HELICOPTER TOOK OFF. FRED GULDEN CLAIMED THAT HE INTENDS TO SUE THE USG FOR LEAVING HIM BEHIND, ALTHOUGH ONE WONDERS WHETHER HE ACTUALLY WILL.

3. ALL BUT FOUR OF THE PASSENGERS APPEAR TO HAVE SPENT THEIR LAST FIFTEEN MONTHS IN SAIGON. EXCEPTIONS WERE HERMAN MCDONALD, PAUL HORTON, AND ANDREW KAJI AND HIS WIFE NGO THI MAU. MCDONALD'S STORY IS THE MOST INTERESTING, AND THE CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH HE SURVIVED WERE THE MOST DIFFICULT, OF ANY OF THE FOUR. TOO LATE FOR THE EVACUATION FROM CONGEN CAN THO, HE WAS ARRESTED JUNE 1, 1975, WHILE HIDING IN A CHURCH. HE THEN SPENT THREE DIFFICULT MONTHS IN THE LONG XUYEN PRISON AND THREE MORE MONTHS IN THAT OF CAN THO, WHILE THE COMMUNISTS TRIED TO MAKE HIM ADMIT THAT HE WORKED FOR CIA. THEY FREQUENTLY BOUND HIS ARMS BEHIND HIS BACK AT THE ELBOWS AND MADE HIM SQUAT ON THE FLOOR FOR 24 HOURS AT A TIME. AT THE END OF THE YEAR HE WAS PLACED IN RE-EDUCATION, WHICH WAS IN EFFECT AN OUTDOOR PRISON WITH CONSTANT FORCED LABOR AND NO EFFORT AT RE-EDUCATION. THE LOCATIONS CHANGED FAIRLY OFTEN. RELEASED IN LATE MARCH, MCDONALD FISHED AND WORKED AS A LABORER AT A RICE MILL IN ORDER TO SUPPORT HIS FAMILY, WITH HIS HOUSE CONSTANTLY UNDER SURVEILLANCE. HE WAS BROUGHT TO SAIGON THE EVE OF THE EVACUATION FLIGHT. MCDONALD'S STORY WILL BE THE SUBJECT OF A SEPARATE AIRGRAM.

4. PAUL HORTON, FORMERLY IVS, WORKED AT THE BIEN HOA MENTAL HOSPITAL UNTIL AFTER THE TAKEOVER. ACCUSED OF WORKING FOR CIA, HE WAS ARRESTED IN SEPTEMBER, SPENDING FIVE MONTHS OR SO IN THE CAN HIEP JAIL IN BIEN HOA PROVINCE AND A SIMILAR PERIOD OF TIME AT THE VO TANH POLICE JAIL IN DOWNTOWN SAIGON, WHERE HE REMAINED UNTIL JUST PRIOR TO AUGUST 1. QUESTIONED INTENSIVELY, HIS INITIAL INTERROGATIONS WERE HARSH (THE "WE KNOW ALL" TECHNIQUE), ALTHOUGH NO PHYSICAL FORCE WAS EMPLOYED EXCEPT FOR OCCASIONAL THREATS TO USE A PISTOL UNLESS HE CLEARED UP CONTRADICTIONS IN HIS TESTIMONY. WHEN HIS INQUISITORS BECAME CONVINCED THAT HE WAS NOT A CIA AGENT, THE INTERROGATIONS BECAME EASIER. WHILE IN PRISON, HORTON ATTENDED FREQUENT HOC TAP OR STUDY SESSIONS DEVOTED TO THE STUDY OF COMMUNIST DOCTRINE, SELF-CRITICISM, AND PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE. HORTON WAS NOT PERMITTED TO BRING CONFIDENTIAL

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OUT WITH HIM HIS NOTES AND BOOKS. HE WAS HOSPITALIZED IN BANGKOK AUGUST 6 FOR SEVERE ANEMIA.

5. ANDREW KAJI AND HIS WIFE MANAGED TO LIVE AND FARM IN THE VANG TAU AREA AFTER MISSING THE EVACUATION. KAJI TRAVELLED TO SAIGON FROM TIME TO TIME TO SEE ABOUT HIS EXIT VISA. AT VUNG TAU, HE TRIED TO PERSUADE ALL HE MET THAT HE WAS JAPANESE RATHER THAN AMERICAN AND, FOR THAT REASON, SEEMED TO COME UNDER

LESS SUSPICION THAN THE OTHER AMERICANS OUTSIDE SAIGON. HE AND HIS WIFE MAINTAINED A VERY DIFFICULT EXISTENCE UNTIL THEY CAME TO SAIGON IN TIME TO CATCH THE FLIGHT.

6. AS FOR THOSE AMERICANS IN SAIGON, THE MAJORITY OF THEM GENERALLY SAT AROUND, WHILING AWAY THE TIME, FREE TO MOVE AROUND THE CITY. KERRY HEUBECK GAVE ENGLISH LESSONS; AMONG HIS PUPILS FOR A TIME WAS MADAME TRINH DINH THAO. THE MIELKES DID VARIOUS THINGS TO EARN MONEY, INCLUDING ROLLING AND SELLING CIGARETTES.

7. SOME OF THOSE AMERICANS IN THE FORMER CAPITAL HAD REAL PROBLEMS, HOWEVER. MIELKE WAS HARRASSED AT TIMES, WITH SOLDIERS COMING OCCASIONALLY TO SEARCH HIS HOUSE. NVA BEAT HIM BEFORE HE DEPARTED, FOR WHICH HE HAD TO HAVE ONE OF HIS EYES STITCHED UP; MIELKE IS VERY RETICENT TO DISCUSS THE INCIDENT. MAURICE BAUHAHN HAS SUGGESTED THAT THOSE WHO FAVORED THE NEW REGIME MOST SEEMED TO HAVE THE WORST PROBLEMS. HE HIMSELF WAS HELD A COUPLE OF TIMES BY THE POLICE. THE MENNONITES WHO DEPARTED EARLIER HAD HAD GUARDS CONSTANTLY OUTSIDE THEIR HOUSE, SOMETHING WE HAD NOT PREVIOUSLY HEARD. FRED GULDEN WAS AT TIMES UNDER SUSPICION. WILLIAM COOPER, REPRESENTING THE COMMITTEE OF RESPONSIBILITY, WAS THROWN INTO CHI HOA PRISON MAY 6, 1975, WHERE HE REMAINED-- GENERALLY IN SOLITARY CONFINEMENT--UNTIL THE END OF JANUARY 1976. ACCUSED OF BEING A CIA AGENT, HE UNDERWENT SOME INTERROGATION. THE PRISON EXPERIENCE WAS SUFFICIENT TO GIVE HIS VIEWS A MORE CONSERVATIVE SLANT THAN HAD HITHERTO BEEN THE CASE, APPARENTLY.

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8. ONE AMERICAN WHO LIVED ON THE SOUTH SIDE OF THE BEN NGHE CANAL HAD PROBLEMS CONSTANTLY FROM THE TIME OF THE TAKEOVER UNTIL HIS DEPARTURE WITH HIS FAMILY. PERRY POLLARD WAS WATCHED AND HARRASSED. HE FOUND THE NUMEROUS NVA IN HIS AREA FAR LESS DIFFICULT TO DEAL WITH THAN THE "APRIL 30 REVOLUTIONARIES", THOSE LOCAL PEOPLE WHO JOINED THE WINNING SIDE AT THE LAST MINUTE AND MISSED NO OCCASION TO DEMONSTRATE THEIR ENTHUSIASM AND "LOYALTY". THEY FREQUENTLY SUCCEEDED IN HAVING POLLARD DETAINED ON TRUMPED UP CHARGES. HE WOULD BE RELEASED FOR A WHILE AFTER EACH OCCASION, THEN THE HARRASSMENT BEGAN ANEW. POLLARD AND HIS FAMILY HAD SERIOUS PROBLEMS JUST TO HAVE FOOD TO EAT FROM DAY TO DAY BUT SOMEHOW ENDURED VERY DIFFICULT CONDITIONS UNTIL AUGUST 1.

9. AS FOR THE VIETNAMESE IN THE GROUP, SOME LIVED ON FUNDS MAILED IN BY RELATIVES ABROAD. OTHERS, HOWEVER, MANAGED TO SURVIVE IN WHATEVER WAY THEY COULD. THRIEU KIEN CUONG, WHOSE PARENTS ARE NATURALIZED CITIZENS, WORKED PREVIOUSLY FOR SONY. UNABLE TO OBTAIN WORK AFTER THE FALL, HE AND HIS FOUR RELATIVES

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WHO DEPARTED SUNDAY SURVIVED BY SELLING THEIR CLOTHING AND, EVENTUALLY, ALL THEIR PERSONAL BELONGINGS IN ORDER TO LIVE. MRS. SUZAN CANTON WORKED IN THE BLACK MARKET IN ORDER TO SUPPORT HERSELF AND HER CHILD.

10. COMMENT. AS THE FOREGOING SHOWS, LIFE WAS NOT EASY IN COMMUNIST SOUTHERN VIET-NAM FOR A NUMBER OF THE RETURNEES, WHO WERE OFTEN SUSPECTED OF BEING CIA AGENTS IN THE PARANOIA THAT PERVADES THE SOUTH AND, CONSEQUENTLY, HARRASSED AND DETAINED. FOR OTHERS, IT INVOLVED SPENDING CONSIDERABLE TIME LOUNGING ABOUT IN THE MANY COFFEE SHOPS WHICH HAVE SPRUNG UP IN SAIGON, DRINKING COFFEE OR SOMETHING STRONGER. THE AMERICANS IN VIET-NAM WERE A VERY DISPARATE GROUP WHICH DID NOT THEN--OR NOW--GET ALONG VERY WELL TOGETHER. THEY ALL ADMIT, HOWEVER, THAT THEY HAVE HAD AN UNFORGETTABLE EXPERIENCE.

11. POSTSCRIPT. THE FIRST PERSONS IN THE GROUP OF FORTY-NINE--THE CANTONS AND FORD THOMASON--BEGIN DEPARTING BANGKOK AUGUST 6. ALTHOUGH THERE ARE A NUMBER OF PROBLEM CASES, MOST ARE BEING RESOLVED. IN ONE, WE ARE FACED WITH A PERSON WHOSE RESIDENT ALIEN PERMIT EXPIRED IN APRIL 1976, WITHOUT HER HAVING BEEN IN A POSITION TO RENEW IT. IN ANOTHER, ALTHOUGH HER CHILDREN

MAY HAVE HAD AN AMERICAN FATHER, THE WOMAN IS HAVING PARTICULAR
TROUBLE ESTABLISHING HER BONA FIDES WHICH WOULD PERMIT HER TO
ENTER THE U.S. THE MISSION IS STILL UNRAVELING THAT ONE.
WHITEHOUSE

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